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Article

## Delivering Social Sustainability Outcomes in New Communities: The Role of the Elected Councillor

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**Abstract:** A 2011 Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) report calculated that an additional 750,000 homes would be needed by 2025 to meet projected demand in the UK. If this is to be achieved, a significant number of new communities will be developed over the next decade. Local councillors have considerable potential in influencing the social sustainability of such new developments, particularly in the context of the current “Localism” agenda in the UK. However, this role of the local councilor is not well understood. The aim of this project was to explore the role of the local councillor in improving such outcomes. We selected two rural greenfield and two urban regeneration sites as case studies. Planning officers and local councillors were interviewed across the sites in order to identify factors that can lead to improved social sustainability. Emerging themes indicate the importance of the councillor’s role in community engagement and consultation, the changing nature of relationships, the importance of appropriate and timely infrastructure, and models of governance and accountability. These findings are discussed in terms of their implications for policy.

**Keywords:** community engagement; local government; sustainable development; council; councillors; new communities

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## 1. Introduction

Local councillors are well positioned to play a key role in realising sustainable outcomes for new communities. However, the potential of this role is not well understood, and the nature of the councillor role means that this potential is not always capitalized upon. In this paper we begin to examine this potential for delivering social sustainability outcomes for new developments through an analysis of local councillors' and council planning officers' experiences of the development of new communities in contrasting locations in England. In this introduction we first explore the policy background regarding new communities in the UK and the concept of social sustainability as used within that context. Secondly we review relevant research which has explored the importance of social infrastructure to the sustainability of new settlements. Thirdly we begin to analyse the role of the local councillor acting within this context, leading on to our research objectives for this study.

### *1.1. Policy Context*

On 12 May 2010, following six days of protracted negotiation, the United Kingdom's first coalition government since the Second World War was formed. One of the main planks of the resulting Coalition Agreement was to devolve power from Westminster to local communities "by giving new powers to local councils, communities, neighbourhoods and individuals" [1]. This increased devolvement of power has been termed "localism". Alongside this, a key aim of both the current and previous UK governments has been to build more affordable homes. In a statement to Parliament on 6 September 2012, the Secretary of State, Eric Pickles announced a series of measures to "promote house building and support locally-led economic growth" [2]. This need is clearly illustrated by the fact that an IPPR report in 2011 estimated that there were currently over 1.75 million households on the housing waiting list and calculated that an additional 750,000 new homes would need to be built by 2025 to meet projected demand [3]. Many of these new homes will be in urban extensions or new settlements, which pose particular challenges in terms of the establishment and development of local communities, and in which the local councillor has a significant degree of potential influence in order to effect sustainable outcomes.

The creation of large new areas of housing is not solely a phenomenon of the late twentieth century. In the UK, Letchworth and Welwyn Garden Cities were the brainchild of Ebenezer Howard, who sought to combine city and rural dwelling on green field sites at the start of the twentieth century. This was followed by rapid house building during the 1920s and 1930s when some four million new homes were built, increasing Britain's housing stock by a third. Many of these were built in massive sprawling estates, with little in the way of social infrastructure provided, and work, education, healthcare or shopping frequently many miles distant [4]. Following the Second World War, the New Towns movement witnessed the growth of towns such as Stevenage, Peterlee, Cumbernauld, Telford and Milton Keynes. Evidence such as that provided to the Transport, Local Government and the Regions Select Committee [5] shows that often the mistakes of the inter-war years in terms of social infrastructure were repeated, with a failure to provide basic social amenities, leading to the phrase "new town blues". As the evidence for the importance of social infrastructure has grown, so social

outcomes have increasingly found their way into the stated aims of national and local policy documents, often sitting alongside or within “sustainable development aims”.

Internationally, Agenda 21, a piece of voluntary UN legislation that came out of the 1992 Rio Earth Summit and implemented on a local level as Local Agenda 21 (LA21), has been one of the most wide-reaching documents to specifically highlight the importance of local level government, and community-level action, in sustainable development. Following this, many councils in the UK initiated LA21 working groups or coordinators and as Selman notes the agenda was “broadened to encompass quality of life.... environmental quality, crime, local health care, education, employment prospects and housing availability” [6]. In England and Wales, the Nottingham Declaration on Climate Change was launched in November 2000, to which over 300 councils put their name [7]. The Nottingham Declaration commits councils, among other things, to work with central government to deliver the UK’s Climate Change Programme and to encourage the local community to adapt to the impacts of climate change. Nationally, the 2003 Sustainable Communities Plan, the blueprint for the then UK government’s housing strategy, set out five key criteria for successful, sustainable communities: a flourishing economy, strong leadership, effective local engagement, a safe and healthy environment, and a layout which minimises the use of resources [8].

To assess the skills required to deliver this Sustainable Communities Plan the Egan Review was subsequently commissioned by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. Egan’s definition of sustainable communities is that they meet “the diverse needs of existing and future residents, their children and other users, contribute to a high quality of life and provide opportunity and choice. They achieve this in ways that make effective use of natural resources, enhance the environment, promote social cohesion and inclusion and strengthen economic prosperity” [9]. This definition highlights the social dimension of sustainability. Moreover, these aims of achieving high quality of life and quality of environment, and a strong “community” are shared amongst numerous other recent policy documents. For example, “Securing the Future”, the UK Government’s Sustainable Development Strategy published in 2005 [10], also made reference to many social aspects, with commitments to enable “people to participate fully by providing new neighbourhood structures and funding to allow people to have a say in the way their neighbourhoods are run” and “creating opportunities locally for people to improve their local environment, health, education, job prospects, and housing”. Subsequently, the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, 2012), which sets out the policy of the current government towards sustainable development, describes social sustainability as “supporting strong, vibrant and healthy communities, by providing the supply of housing required to meet the needs of present and future generations; and by creating a high quality built environment, with accessible local services that reflect the community’s needs and support its health, social and cultural well being” [11]. The NPPF has replaced a series of Policy Planning Statements (PPS) and Policy Planning Guidance (PPG), which set out Government policy on the delivery of housing and growth in the United Kingdom. Through these examples we can see that policy documents cover the three pillars of social, environmental and economic sustainability. At the local council level, LA21 and then the Nottingham Declaration were used as frameworks to implement the Government’s climate change agenda. The Nottingham Declaration was superseded in 2012 in some areas by Climate Local, a local government initiative to support council action on carbon reduction and building resilience to the changing climate. To date, according to the Local Government Association, around 50 councils have signed up to

Climate Local (compared to over 300 councils who signed the Nottingham declaration) [12]. Within the UK today, aims and plans for development tend to be set out within the Local Development Framework (LDF), Local Plan (LP), and/or Area Action Plan (AAP). The LDF tends to set out overall principles, whereas the LP will be more specific regarding proposals for the region (e.g., suggestions of specific areas which may be developed), and AAPs will then focus on smaller particular areas. Following this, planning for the physical design and in particular for the funding of particular new communities and urban extensions is established through Section 106 of the 1990 Town and Country Planning Act. S106 agreements are held between local authorities and developers and require developers to make a financial contribution to local planning authorities to offset the costs of the external effects of the development. The introduction within some Local Authorities of the new Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) in recent years has provided new opportunities, as it allows councils to charge developers for infrastructure that is required for a wider area beyond the physical boundaries of the development. However adoption of a CIL by local authorities as a result of changes through the Localism Act 2011 was not statutory, and the majority continue to use S106 agreements, which is therefore the most relevant to local councillors involved in establishing new communities today, giving a legally binding framework for the financing of new developments.

As can be seen from the above, legislation changes with regularity, and in particular new governments often revise the structures in place. For example, significant changes implemented post-2010 included removal of the County Structure Plans and Regional Spatial Strategies. As new developments often take decades to be completed, this means that the planning framework in place at the start of a new settlement may look quite different from the one at the end, and this was found in our case study sites. Given the prominence of social concerns in contemporary UK policy, this paper seeks to assess the role of social sustainability in the development of new settlements, and particularly the role that a local councillor can play in fostering and encouraging social sustainability in this process, given the shifting context. Often, and indeed as we found within our case studies, during the planning process for new communities sustainability objectives are held implicitly rather than made explicit.

## 1.2. Social Sustainability: A Review

In this brief review we firstly explore the overall concept of sustainable development (SD), and discuss indicators which are used to attempt quantify SD, before focusing on the social sustainability (SS) dimension of SD, and reviewing previous research which has looked at the role of local government in its promotion.

There is no single definition of SD, however certain features are commonly found. The NPPF (2012) refers specifically to the three recognised strands of SD: economic, social and environmental, also seen within Egan's definition of a sustainable community. SD is often characterised as development or change which facilitates positive outcomes in each of these areas (again, what is meant by "positive" varies according to commentator) without compromising outcomes for future generations. Analysis within the academic literature has revealed the tensions which can arise between "competing" economic, social and environmental objectives. Rogers *et al.* have noted that in recent years within the urban regeneration debate "when grappling with the issues of sustainability, the environmental aspect dominated and the social aspect was largely ignored" [13]. Campbell describes the "planner's triangle"

where goals relating to economic development, environmental protection and equity/social justice can conflict [14]. Campbell proposes that the usefulness of the concept of SD may be in advocating “the long-term planning goal of a social-environmental system in balance”. The observation that SD may primarily be about good urban planning policies is reflected in work by Blanco *et al.* [15]. However, in contrast to the “conflicting priorities” model, some have concluded that success in each area may rely on success in the others. With reference to Local Agenda 21 in particular, Selman [6] claims that “environmental objectives cannot be achieved unless social, political and economic objectives are also accommodated”.

In order to quantify the many facets of SD, a myriad of sustainability indicators have been developed over the years. Tanguay *et al.* recently completed a review of local indicators in an attempt to bring some cohesion to this picture [16]. In their analysis, nine “social and institutional” categories of indicator were identified: demographics, housing, education, security, health, wellbeing, social and community services, governance, and expenses and public administration. They also emphasised the need for indicators which are readily implementable. This was a key point also made by Reed *et al.* [17] who compared “top down” to “bottom up” indicators. Top down indicators, prescribed for example by scientists or policy makers, were seen as potentially more objective or “scientific” but having the drawback of being more difficult to implement, whereas the second category, developed by those on the ground, were more practical, but potentially less able to be used as benchmarks or for comparison between sites.

From a policy and planning perspective, while there has been considerable emphasis on the impacts of physical design and infrastructure planning upon SD (e.g., in previous government Policy Planning Statements and Policy Planning Guidance and the Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA) study on best practice in urban extensions [18]), there appears to have been less emphasis to date on the role that social infrastructure can play. Vallance *et al.*’s review of the concept of social sustainability (SS) identified three differing core aspects [19]. They denoted “development”, “bridge” and “maintenance” social sustainability as relating to: meeting basic human needs; promoting greater connections between people and the environment; and enabling valued social and cultural practices to continue, respectively. Each of these may be priorities for different actors, and can potentially come into conflict with, or support, each other. Evidence suggests that there may be specific social areas where outcomes in new communities are poorer [20]: there may be reduced access to local amenities; fewer people who participate in regular volunteering or a civic activity; increased anti-social behavior, and people may be less satisfied overall with the local area. These in particular seem to reflect the “development” and “maintenance” aspects of SS, as delineated by Vallance *et al.*

Strong social outcomes are of course of particular importance for local councillors, and local residents, and are the subject of this paper. Previous academic research in this area has looked at the role of the local government in the process of promoting social sustainability. Evans *et al.*, for example, analysed 40 case studies from across Europe to assess which institutional (within both national and local government) or social factors may have been critical to the furthering of SD agendas [21]. Their research supported the idea that local government may be best placed to pursue SD goals. However they also noted that a key factor was the amount of dialogue between high level government and civil society, and that institutional capital could play a key role in building social capital as well as vice versa. In one analysis of Vauban [22], a district in Freiberg, Germany which has been at the forefront

of engaging with SD, and is a widely cited case study, particular attention is given to the importance placed on representing the interests of residents who are not there yet. In Vauban this was in fact achieved through the involvement of a community organisation, Forum Vauban, which from a very early point acted as a link between government/planners and the community. Specific to the UK, Selman looked in depth at four Local Authorities (LAs), to see how they had implemented Local Agenda 21 [6]. It was found that LA21 had in some sense given LAs the role of facilitator rather than instigator of change. It was also found to be hard for LAs to engage business and civil society who were not already engaged.

Within the community development literature, Imrie [23], looked at the role of the local councillor in the UK, and how this may have changed over the previous 20 years. He concluded that practices had shifted, including many examples of new structures being put in place to give community groups the opportunity to influence decision making. More recently Eversole [24] discusses the emphasis that continues to be placed on community participation at the local decision making level. Eversole's review concludes that a core challenge is that participation "is impossible to achieve for others". There can exist a gap between "organisations" (including LAs) and "communities", with both keen to work with the other in principle but a gap often existing between them. Ways of thinking about knowledge as "expert led" for example can limit the credit given to community based knowledge, and translators may be needed who can move between groups.

In conclusion, sustainable development is often seen as being made up of three key pillars: economic, social and environmental. There are many different indicators which are used to measure success or progress in each of these fields, but no consensus over which ones are most critical. Social sustainability has several different aspects, and it seems that for new communities those of "bridge" and "maintenance" social sustainability may be areas where there is evidence of poorer outcomes. Research looking at the role of local government often identifies the importance of "community engagement", and the role of the LA as facilitator between groups, however barriers are seen to remain to achieving this.

### *1.3. The Role of the Local Councillor within the Process of Planning New Settlements*

Local councillors have the opportunity to influence new housing developments in their area at a number of stages during the planning process. They can influence decisions which have significant long term impacts, and are therefore of key importance to sustainability agendas. Councillors in England and Wales are normally elected for a four year term, but can continue to stand for re-election indefinitely. Councils vary in structure. In some areas there are three tiers: Parish, District and County, whereas large urban areas are usually single tier unitary authorities. Responsibility for planning rests with the Planning Authority, which is either the District or Unitary council (or, in London, the Borough), although County and Parish Councillors have an opportunity to comment on planning applications.

The role of a local councillor changes during the electoral cycle. Prior to election, a candidate may make a number of promises to the electorate, which aim to represent the needs or wishes of particular sections of their constituency. However during their time as a councillor their role is to represent all their constituents, whatever party they voted for—or if they did not vote at all. They also have a broader policy making role on their council, within specific committees, where they will also be

expected to represent those from outside their own ward. In combination with the S106 requirements as noted above, this changing role can have a fundamental impact on developments: for developers, for example, the timing of a planning application in the electoral cycle may be crucial.

There are two key points at which a local councillor can influence development in their area. The first is during the preparation of the Local Development Framework or Local Plan for the area, which sets out the policies against which specific planning applications can be judged, and must be kept up to date (typically being amended every 6–10 years). The preparation of a Local Plan begins with a technical analysis of the needs of the local area and is subject to several stages of public consultation before adoption. Planning applications for developments within the local area must thereafter be consistent with the Local Plan, and this is the second stage at which councillors can also influence the process. Once a planning application is received, councillors have further opportunities to comment on the specific application, either during the consultation process, or at the planning committee. Thus the local councillor has significant opportunity to both be involved in, but also potentially to address, many of the issues that impact negatively on new communities, but also those which can contribute to social sustainability.

#### *1.4. Research Objectives*

This initial study, undertaken over nine months, intends to address the issue of how local councillors in the UK can influence the positive social development of new, sustainable communities. The research examines different approaches adopted regarding the role of the local councillor in four new communities. Through semi-structured interviews with planning officers and local councillors in these new communities, we explored four research questions within the context of these specific sites:

- How were existing communities and early residents engaged, and what role did or could councillors play in this process?
- What was the nature of the relationship between councillors, their local authority and developers, and what issues arose within these?
- What social infrastructure did local councillors perceive made, or could make, a difference in the social pillar of sustainable development of their new communities?
- How did the different governance arrangements compare between each of the new communities studied?

## **2. Methodology**

### *2.1. Case Study Site Selection*

Twelve developments across the UK were considered during the case study selection process. A key criterion was to identify sites which would offer a range of experiences across the final sample. Four new communities in England were selected, two greenfield sites and two regeneration sites—see Figure 1. They were chosen because they offer very different models of community engagement in the process of their development. In the case of the greenfield sites, there were either no or only a handful of existing residents at that specific location, but instead had existing settlements nearby on which the new development would impact. For both of the regeneration sites, an existing major employer had

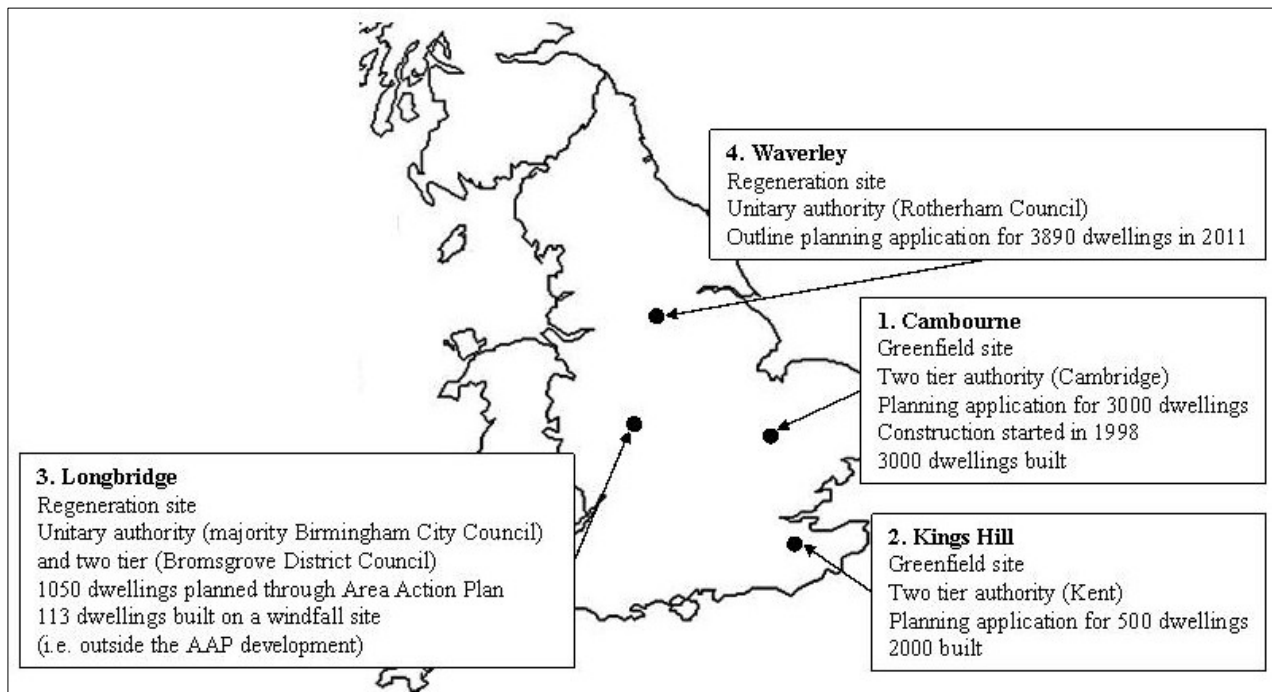


shut down, leading to large job losses. In three of the four case studies (Cambourne, Kings Hill and Waverley) the original plans for development had either changed or been adapted, leading to further consultation and engagement with residents. The sites were as follows:

- (1). *Cambourne* in Cambridgeshire was identified as the site of a new settlement in 1989 to meet anticipated demand for housing in the Cambridge area, although building did not commence for a further nine years until 1998. A shortlist of sites had been identified by South Cambridgeshire District Council and the planning officers had recommended Bourne Airfield for the location, but Councillors decided to select Cambourne. Cambourne was conceived by its developers as “a complete lifestyle on your doorstep” [25]. The original plan for 3000 homes has been delivered, but it is now subject to a further 950 homes, with potential for additional housing on an adjacent airfield in the South Cambridgeshire (Strategic Land Housing Land Availability Assessment) [26]). Cambourne sits within a two tier authority; land was primarily in the ownership of private individuals prior to its acquisition by two national house building companies.
- (2). *Kings Hill* in Kent is of a similar size to Cambourne (2473 houses), but was started nearly ten years earlier in 1989 and therefore is more established than Cambourne. Land ownership was split between Kent County Council and Liberty Property Company. It was originally conceived as a business park, with only 500 homes, but changing market conditions has resulted in a more mixed use development. Consultation started in September 2012 on a further 277 houses, plus 1.2 million ft<sup>2</sup> of business space (more than double the existing space) and a 150 acre country park. It also lies within a two tier authority
- (3). *Longbridge*, a suburb of Birmingham, is the site of the largest regeneration project in the country. For 100 years it was home to the now demolished British Leyland car factory (subsequently named MG Rover), once one of the largest manufacturing plants in the world, employing up to 32,000 people. The car plant finally closed in 2005, but by that stage, a new vision for the area was already being mooted by Birmingham City Council. The Area Action Plan for Longbridge sets out the vision for the future as an “exemplar sustainable, employment led mixed use development for the benefit of the local community, Birmingham, Bromsgrove, the region and beyond” [27]. The AAP will deliver 1050 new homes and a new town centre plus plans to create some 10,000 new jobs. While the vast majority of the Longbridge site lies within Birmingham City Council, a unitary authority, some parts are also in Bromsgrove Borough Council which is within the larger Worcestershire County Council. The City and Borough Councils are the relevant Planning Authorities for Longbridge, but Worcestershire County Council has a wider strategic role.
- (4). *Waverley*, on the outskirts of Rotherham is in the ownership of UK Coal and was the site of some of the bitterest confrontations of the 1984 miners strike. The aim of the development, according to the landowner Harworth Estates (the property arm of British Coal), was to transform the closed surface mine and create a “sustainable mixed use development” [28]. Some 3900 houses are proposed, along with community facilities, including shops, a school and health centre. In contrast to Longbridge, the Advanced Manufacturing Plant (AMP) at Waverley which will eventually deliver 2000 jobs has been built well in advance of the houses.

Planning for the AMP started in 2000, but a planning application for the housing development was not submitted until 2008. The first houses were started in the summer of 2012. Waverley lies wholly within Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council, a unitary authority, but borders Sheffield City Council.

**Figure 1.** Map showing locations of the four case study sites, as well as indicating the type of site (regeneration or greenfield), the type of local authority, and the number of dwelling planned and built.



The four developments chosen represented a geographical spread across England (South East, East of England, Midlands, and North of England); had different histories of land ownership; were at different stages in the development process and encompassed a range of local authority administration structures (two tier, unitary). While both greenfield sites are in two tier authorities and the regeneration sites are in unitary authorities this is due to the nature of the type of local authority: shire counties largely being rural in nature, while unitary authorities are typically urban. For the most part, within each of these four developments there was little or no explicit sustainability agenda or planned outcome, and where sustainability was mentioned it was not defined. Rather, as we note in our research findings below, individual councillors may have specific aims relating to sustainable development and can play a role in making sustainability aims more explicit and/or ensuring that they are included in new community development.

## 2.2. Participants

Several visits were made to each of the sites and semi-structured group and individual interviews were conducted by the first author with planning officers and ward councillors at all tiers of local government. Planning officers are employed by the local council and have a variety of technical expertise, such as formal planning qualifications or being able to advise councillors on planning law.

Between three and five people were interviewed in total at each case study site (see Table 1). For this initial project, it was decided that only councillors with more than four years of experience would be interviewed, as the focus was on eliciting information from those with significant experience of following the new community development process over a number of years. However we note the potential for future research to work with those who are also relatively new to their role, to identify key needs. All local ward councillors for Longbridge (six councillors in two wards) and Waverley (nine councillors in three wards) were contacted with requests for interview. In both cases only one local member was available, but each had a good knowledge of the development. At Kings Hill the district and county councillors were contacted, along with the chairman of the Parish Council. Interviews were conducted with all three tiers of local authority—the County Councillor, District Councillor and chairman of the Parish Council. At Cambourne, of the three District Councillors, one did not live in the local area, a second had been a councillor for only four years, (some eight years after development had commenced, and eighteen years after plans were first proposed) and there was a vacancy for the third councillor. The chairman of the Parish Council was therefore interviewed, along with the Parish Clerk, who had been in post since 2005 and had detailed background knowledge of the development. Given the number of parish councillors (around ten) in Cambourne and Kings Hill, it was decided to limit requests to the chairman of the Parish Council.

**Table 1.** Details of the participants in the ten interviews at the four case study sites.

| Interview reference | Site       | Role of interviewees                            | Number of interviewees | Total officers or councillors   |
|---------------------|------------|---|------------------------|---------------------------------|
| CO                  | Cambourne  | Planning Officers                               | 2                      | 2                               |
| CM                  | Cambourne  | Parish Council chairman                         | 1                      | 1                               |
| CC                  | Cambourne  | Clerk to the Parish Council                     | 1                      | 1                               |
| KHO                 | Kings Hill | Planning Officer                                | 1                      | 1                               |
| KHM1                | Kings Hill | District Councillor and Parish Council Chairman | 2                      | 3                               |
| KHM2                | Kings Hill | County Councillors                              | 1                      | 1                               |
| LO                  | Longbridge | Planning Officers                               | 2                      | 2                               |
| LM                  | Longbridge | Ward Councillor                                 | 1                      | 6                               |
| WO                  | Waverley   | Planning Officers                               | 3                      | 3                               |
|                     |            |   |                        | 10                              |
| WM                  | Waverley   | Ward Councillor and Deputy Leader               | 2                      | (9 Councillors + Deputy Leader) |

### 2.3. Procedure

Each interview lasted roughly ninety minutes. Interviewees were asked questions regarding the following topics:

- the consultation and engagement process;
- governance arrangements for the development;
- housing policy for the area and the type and extent of affordable housing;
- priorities for social infrastructure and S106 agreements.

In addition local councillors were asked about specific challenges relating to their role as a councillor and whether there were differences between their approach to the new community and existing communities within their ward.

Interviews were recorded, with permission of the interviewees, and then transcribed by the first author. Once all the interviews had taken place, each case study was written up and sent back to the relevant interviewees to ensure accuracy of reporting. In addition to the interviews, and a review of existing literature, the author's own experience of planning and development in relation to the proposed new town of Northstowe, Cambridgeshire also informed the design and analysis of this study.

A thematic analysis was undertaken on the ten interviews. Each interview was re-read several times by the researchers in order to familiarise themselves with the data. Initial descriptive codes were then assigned systematically and comprehensively to all data, with a particular focus on data extracts relevant to our research questions and to social sustainability more generally. Extracts with common codes were then grouped together and both initial codes and the extracts within each grouping analysed in order to identify common themes that captured core meaningful aspects of the dataset in relation to our research questions. The extracts and codes within each theme were then revisited, with further sub-themes identified within each as appropriate to illustrate complexity within themes. In the analysis presented below, we use representative quotes which are illustrative of these themes. In addition, we include relevant policy detail and key implications arising from each of the issues, in order to highlight the role of the local councillor.

### 3. Results and Discussion

The results of the research have been grouped into four main themes:

- *Local Community: Communication, Engagement and Support*: The importance of high quality community engagement and consultation;
- *Relationships: Conflict and Collaboration*: The changing nature of councillor-developer and councillor-community relationships and the transition from politics to governance;
- *Infrastructure: Right Place, Right Time*: The value of having appropriate infrastructure in place at the right time; and
- *Governance and Accountability can Help or Hinder Community Development*: The impact of different models within the case study sites.

These themes are presented below, with each of the case studies being used to illustrate how these themes have arisen in local contexts.

#### 3.1. Local Community: Communication, Engagement and Support

##### 3.1.1. Community Involvement at an Early Stage

Early communication was recognised in all the case studies as vital. Within our case study sites, in Longbridge, the City Council identified that the future of the area would require careful planning three years before the demise of MG Rover. A Consultative Group was set up by the local ward councillor which involved local groups, including local residents groups, church groups and representatives from

the factory. Although they were essentially self-selecting, the members of this group were considered by the local councillor to be representative of the area as a whole. In drawing up a plan for the area, Birmingham City Council chose to use outside consultants to carry out consultation with the local community. As one interviewee described “it was an emotive issue and... [there was] a fear that planners already have their pre-conceived ideas of what’s going to happen” (LO). Using outside consultants, who were perceived as more neutral, was seen as allowing local residents to have their say on future development, rather than seeing it as being imposed upon them.

Government guidance, whether in the form of the NPPF or earlier guidance, has emphasised the importance of involving local communities in planning [11]. Engagement can take a number of forms as observed by Arnstein in the Ladder of Citizen Participation model, ranging from non-participation through to citizen power [29]. In Vauban, the German district mentioned above, a local group named Forum Vauban acted as “an intermediary between the planning authorities and future residents” and advised councillors prior to planning decisions affecting Vauban being made. Although it is hard to measure the impact this has had on social sustainability, it is often held up as a model of good practice. Carlile and Thorenson [30] also emphasise the importance of high levels of communication in community engagement, through sharing information. Involvement of existing communities at or near to new developments was important for the development of both greenfield and regeneration sites. As we note below, while residents within redevelopment sites will obviously require consultation, existing communities that are located close to greenfield developments also require sufficient consultation and involvement in the new development, as the issues at stake are no less pressing for them. For example, at Cambourne the plans for the new development also included a by-pass for the neighbouring village of Caxton. This led to some resentment in Bourn: “Bourn still want to turn their back on Cambourne. Caxton had a real benefit, which was the bypass, whereas with hindsight [you] can ask what benefits Bourn got” (CO). Although a regeneration site, there were no existing residents in Waverley, but extensive consultation was carried out in the neighbouring parishes of Treeton, Catcliffe and Orgreave. The sites of both Cambourne and Kings Hill fell into existing parishes, enabling consultation with residents there. In none of the sites could it be claimed that full scale citizen power participation took place, although partnership was attempted in Longbridge through the Consultative Group, similar in nature to Forum Vauban.

### 3.1.2. New Methods of Communication

A number of different tools can be used during consultation. Both Cambourne and Kings Hill were conceived prior to the Internet age and early consultation relied on traditional methods, including leaflets and public meetings. Increasing availability of the Internet now means that more innovative techniques can also be used to good effect; these may include interactive web surveys, where respondents can “visualise” the impact of changing a particular piece of the development. It also allows those who may not wish to take part in more traditional public meetings to have their say. Participants indicated how the widespread use of social media in society can also be adapted as a method of communication and engagement, “the idea was that through whatever means available, everyone should have the ability to input” (LO). The Longbridge Area Action Plan was the outcome of a consultation that involved 25,000 residents, businesses and stakeholders, with a specific emphasis on

“hard to reach” groups. Cambourne has an active on-line forum where residents can obtain information and exchange views on aspects of life in Cambourne, in addition to the more formal Parish Council website. A grant from the Local Government Association has also enabled Cambridgeshire County Council to set up another website providing an online forum for residents to raise issues or highlight events, initially for the whole of the Fenland area, although this is now being extended to cover other parts of the County.

### 3.1.3. Supporting Communities through the Planning Process

There are some key stages in the planning process where communities may struggle to feel that their voice is being heard. One of these is during the formal planning process once an application has been received and prior to its determination by the local planning committee. Consultees will be presented with potentially vast planning documents and a relatively short time in which to make a formal response. The Chairman of Kings Hill Parish Council observed that the parish council were “not even told about the EIA until it came through” (KHM2). The Environmental Impact Assessment Scoping Document (EIA) is a crucial document for understanding the impact of proposed development on the surrounding community. The Planning Officers at South Cambridgeshire District Council were also aware of the workload being placed on parish councillors and made a point of attending parish council meetings to talk through the relevant documents during the Cambourne planning process “I remember regularly going to Caxton—a very small parish trying to cope with very large application; we put resource in to trying to support them” (CO). The Chairman of Kings Hill Parish Council suggested that pre-consultation on the plans to be submitted (as opposed to consultation at concept stage) was an important part of the overall process. This is not a legal requirement, but local authorities such as Cambridgeshire are increasingly seeing it as an example of good practice.

### 3.1.4. Managing Expectations—Timing

It was noted in all the case studies that there is a need to engage with community at an appropriate level of detail so that they can understand that the project will be a long term one: “when working with a community at that level of detail we can ‘educate’ them so they can understand that it is a 15–20 year project [and is] not going to happen overnight” (LO). While the Garden Cities of the early twentieth century were constructed in a relatively short space of time, today’s planning process is more extensive which can lead to frustration within local communities. Letchworth, for example, had 2000 homes and 12 factories in ten years, whereas it took from 1992 to 1998 just to complete the planning process for Cambourne and building is still continuing. In Longbridge, the factory closed in 2005, but the Area Action plan was not approved until 2009. The financial crisis that started in 2008 meant that developers in Longbridge, as elsewhere in the country, stopped all work on the project. Local residents were left wondering what the future of the site would be. There is a role for local councillors to ensure that communities have a full appreciation of timescales—and are fully informed when timescales change, as they invariably will. Expectations are raised during consultation and the local councillor has an important role to manage those as the project progresses.

The Planning Officers for Longbridge noted that during the planning process, “the local community saw an empty site and assumed every month that something would happen” (LO). Once development

in Longbridge started in 2011 the community felt more comfortable because they could see progress. The local ward councillor has also renamed the Consultative Group, the “Longbridge Regeneration Group”, in order to emphasise in people’s minds the shift to the next stage of the process “I chair the Longbridge Regeneration Group—the Consultative Group—we have dropped the consultative part now; originally it was set up to consult on what was going to happen” (LM). This frustration over lack of progress has also been noted elsewhere, particularly at Orchard Park on the edge of Cambridge where work stopped mid-development for nine months between September 2008 and June 2009 [31].

### 3.1.5. Managing Expectations—Impacts

The kinds of issues raised by existing communities faced with new development which could be dealt with by local councillors covered both immediate and long term impacts. In Waverley, managing expectations took a different form. For many years there had been an understanding in the local community that the coalfield would become the site of a country park and the decision to build some 3900 homes on the site led to some unhappiness locally. The recent decision to extend the proposed second high speed rail line through part of the site has also led to some unease about the future for the area, particularly for local wildlife groups [32]. Decisions made by external actors can also arise which compound anxieties around the planned development itself, for example changing the mix of development between residential and commercial development in Kings Hill, or the allocation of an additional 950 houses in Cambourne. The experience of the first author has been that proposed changes to a planned development are frequently perceived as a threat by the local community. In Kings Hill problems have arisen because of a decision by South West Trains (the local operator) to restrict services to London from the nearby train station. Since Kings Hill was designed as a commuter village for London, this has led to concerns locally which the chairman of the Parish Council feels needs to be addressed in the next franchise round.

The local councillor has an important role in managing expectations in terms of how the perceived problems of the area can be seen as either being caused by, or be solved through, the new development. Consultation responses to the Waverley proposals, for example, demonstrated considerable fears about potential future increased flooding in Catcliffe. One participant described how comments were made in response to the consultation such as: “we’ve got to make sure [we] sort out flooding—it’s on a flood plain” (WM). Likewise the residents of Bourn blamed the building works at Cambourne when their village flooded in 2001. Residents may want S106 funding to be used to solve existing traffic problems, whether or not it is relevant to the development. The local councillor has to tread a tricky line between supporting existing, established communities and at the same time representing the interests of his or her newest constituents: “certainly in the case of the rural parishes—people blame Kings Hill for many of their problems. So it’s quite tricky representing both” (KHM2).

### 3.1.6. Summary

We summarise here the findings of the *Communication, Engagement and Support* theme. Good communication and engagement throughout the planning process is widely seen as a key factor for achieving social sustainability within the policy literature, not least the Sustainable Communities Plan. Previous research has also highlighted that this can be an area where local authorities can play a

critical role, as evidenced by Selman [6]—a belief that is also, arguably, reflected in the new localism agenda. However, in seeking to ensure social sustainability as envisaged in the NPPF, communities may require support in helping to shape their neighbourhood. The use of external consultants who are distinct from the planning authority may help local residents feel that they are part of the process, rather than that it has been imposed on them. Modern methods of social media and communication may provide greater opportunities for councillors to engage with their communities; currently there appears to be little training for this. When major planning applications are being submitted, there are many technical issues where time or expertise may be a barrier for local communities. There is an important role for councillors in ensuring that appropriate support is given to communities at this important stage of the process, since if communities understand what is being planned, they will better be able to feel a part of the development. It is essential for councillors to be informed and in turn to inform. Councillors have a role to play in managing expectations and particularly in dealing with tensions between existing and new communities.

### *3.2. Relationships: Conflict and Collaboration*

#### *3.2.1. Politicisation*

New developments have historically attracted opposition from existing residents and politicians have frequently borne the brunt of this opposition. Councillors have frequently been elected on a platform of opposition to a particular development, whether large or small. This can lead to development becoming politicised, potentially influencing the assessment of how beneficial or not it may be for the wider local authority area. Local councillors in both Longbridge and Waverley were keen to emphasise the importance of “taking the politics out” (LM) of development, and “We don’t do party politics in Rotherham—we don’t need to; nor at parish level” (WM), although perhaps this is easier to achieve in regeneration projects such as these, where there is a perception that the area will be improved as a result, than when building takes place on a greenfield site, where local residents may simply see the destruction of open fields. To do this requires extensive, effective local consultation and good communication so that the aims and objectives of the development are clear to the local community. Trust, or distrust, appears to be a key issue. Sturzacker states that “it is widely recognized that the public do not trust politicians, developers or even experts. Others, however, have argued that perhaps the trust issue works in reverse—people decide that they are opposed to a proposal and thus distrust anyone who supports it—so distrust is caused by opposition to a development, rather than being the cause of it” [33]. In their study of new towns and urban extensions the TCPA emphasize the importance of developing “cross party support” for development, given that they will undoubtedly cover many electoral cycles. In his paper on LA21, Selman notes the difficulty of de-politicization: “most members felt more accountable to the ballot box than to the various outreach processes associated with LA21, and were more concerned about ‘back door politics’” [6]. As this paper as a whole demonstrates, there is scope for additional training and support for councillors in balancing the sustainability versus political needs.

It could be argued that changes to the process of financing new developments have led to greater politicisation and opposition than in the past. The New Towns of the 1950s and 1960s were initiated



and funded by central government, through loans to be paid back over time. Land was compulsorily purchased at agricultural value and the subsequent gain in value once planning permission had been received was then captured and invested back in the development. Development was therefore funded through the public purse. The developments of the early twenty first century have been different in nature in that they are frequently promoted by private companies, whose interests are perceived by the local population to be different. The financing options used previously are no longer available and developers are reliant on banks and shareholders to fund a development. Developers are seen to be there simply to make a profit for their shareholders, with little respect for the local community. “They are all reasonable people but their role is to make it a successful development and make sure that the development is profitable” (KHM2). On the other hand, as one can see from the quote above, there is a recognition that in order for the development to make a profit, it also has to be successful.

### 3.2.2. Changing Councillor-Developer and Councillor-Community Relationships

The planning process provides many opportunities for local councillors to shape development in their council area. This research has identified that the role of the local member in the development of new communities changes over time. Local councillors are elected to represent the interests of their community, but those interests will change during the planning process. It is also the case that different members of communities will have different views, and a councillor will not be able to represent every one. He or she will therefore need to make a judgment as to what the “best interests” of the community are. Here the councillor has quite a degree of influence on the sustainability outcomes of the process. How this influence can be realised will involve a balance between the immediate demands from the community, or sections within it, and the perceived longer term interests of the community, as well as a balance between different policy agendas/priorities. Tension was reported between the developers and the local community and ward councillors, regardless of whether the scheme was regenerating the local area or a greenfield site. The issue for the local community and councillors to consider is whether engagement with developers at an early stage leads to assumed implicit acceptance that the scheme would go ahead. On the other hand, the local councillor may feel that they should be engaging with developers at this stage to try to improve outcomes for his or her community. Some local councillors see their primary role as being to represent the community to the local council, rather than trying to shape development. As one councillor commented “the role of local member [is] to represent the views of residents to the county council but it is not to be a part of decision making since if I am part of decision making then I am one of the people I should be lobbying against” (KHM2). This was particularly the case in Kings Hill, where the two tier system of local government means that the County Councillor is not a member of the local planning committee. Foot argues that where a councillors’ role as community advocate is unclear, it “can lead to conflict” [34]. The TCPA also highlight the role of the local councillor in “explaining to local residents and businesses the long term vision” and in “maintaining momentum” [35].

At the outset, when options for development are being identified, the local member may well wish to lead opposition to building in their area, since it may well be perceived as a vote winning strategy in forthcoming elections. However, once the planning process has been completed, local councillors will need to balance the interests of existing residents with those who have yet to move into the area.

Moving from a position of opposition to a development to acceptance that a decision has been taken and it will happen can take time and adjustment for both the local ward member and the community they represent. Indeed, despite the granting of planning consent, they may continue to feel that opposing the development is in the best interests of the community they represent. As noted in the introduction, the timing of a large planning application in the electoral cycle may also be critical. This has been noted in a number of the case studies. In Longbridge, for example, the local ward councillor commented that “at first, [I] took the usual elected member stance; being a resident and challenging what they were doing. Since then, [it’s] a question of—you are a developer, [and] as an elected member, it’s better for us to work together and for me to do what I can... [if we] have a relationship that’s fractured then things may not get done as quickly or with the same quality; so having a dialogue and...a good relationship is imperative to get things done” (LM).

Councillors need to understand at what point in the planning process acting in the best interests of their constituents might mean supporting the development, and working with those responsible for bringing it about. There is evidence that where there is effective engagement in the planning process, outcomes can be improved [36]. However, in the early stages, the main concern of communities and local councillors can be in opposing the development which affects the prospect of meaningful engagement. Moreover, a “democratic deficit” was noted by Sturzacker, particularly where negotiations take place between council officers and developers [33]. This can lead to communities feeling that they have been “done to”, rather than “consulted with”. Partly to address the notion that councils have pre-conceived ideas, Birmingham City Council chose to use independent consultants to carry out the initial consultation on the future of the Longbridge site, as explored in Section 3.1.1.

Different local councillors may have different views on their role. One respondent notably summed up his relationship with the developers as being: “On the side of the prisoners against the guards, but [I] have to go and speak to Camp Commandant occasionally, who is perfectly nice and wants to be helpful but it’s fundamentally not his role to be helpful, only in so far as it furthers his development.” (KHM2). The local ward councillor can also act as an important mediator between developers and the community. In Kings Hill in Kent in 2005, relations between the newly formed Parish Council and the developers were not good, with neither side engaging in any form of dialogue. The County Councillor noted that it was not in anyone’s interest for this to continue and “despite the fact that each was telling me how completely impossible the other was. I took the line that some discussions, minor communication, really had to be established” (KHM2).

### 3.2.3. Summary

In summary of this section on relationships, local councillors have a range of often competing interests to manage in new residential building developments. As discussed in the Introduction, conflicts can be seen to arise within sustainable development between its economic, environmental and social aims as noted by both Rogers *et al.* [13] and Campbell [14]. For the local councillor, a particular example we found was that election to a council where a new development is proposed may involve election promises in relation to these potential developments. These may be driven in part by environmental motives, such as objection to development on greenfield sites. However, once development is approved there can be a new responsibility, including regarding social aspects, to

existing and future residents. The range of relationships between local councillors and the various stakeholders involved are therefore often dynamic and changing, with a further source of change being regular alterations in legislation and policy vision from central government, seen in the Introduction. The current system for financing new developments through S106 agreements often involves trade-offs and a judgment about what infrastructure is more important. This can result in councillors and developers taking polarized views, rather than working in partnership to secure the best outcomes for the development. Moving from a position of opposition to working with the developers was often seen by interviewees as a sign of a maturing relationship to achieve better community outcomes. However, this is not always appreciated by the local community, who may view such a relationship as “selling out” to developers. Strong leadership is required by local councillors where large development is planned to ensure the best outcomes for the local community and to address sustainability concerns.

### *3.3. Infrastructure: Right Place, Right Time*

#### *3.3.1. The Importance of the Timely Provision of Social Infrastructure*

In all of the case studies, the importance of good quality social infrastructure was noted. Interviewees were asked what infrastructure they considered essential when the first residents moved in. The majority mentioned a community facility (whether or not it was planned or had been provided) as a place for people to meet. In Cambourne the chairman of the parish council said “the first thing I would build would be a fantastic school with a community wing, because you can’t have all the facilities you need until you get a certain number of houses, but you do need a community space and a school from the word go” (CM). In Waverley there were other priorities “a health centre because of oversubscription at Catcliffe surgery” and the “flexibility to use a house as a small shop” were officers priorities (WO). Employment of community development workers was also viewed as a priority in both developments: “We had a really good sports development officer and a really good community development officer and she managed to help people to set up the Cambourne Crier” (CM). In Waverley the post was envisaged as part of the Management Company “UK Coal would employ someone direct, or come from the community as it develops” (WO). However, approaches towards its provision varied. The Ward Councillor in Longbridge said “a community facility is wanted, but it’s not going to happen and that’s a shame” (LM). Timely and appropriate provision of infrastructure, including consideration of schools, transport planning, a community centre and appropriate open space, is a vital part of creating socially sustainable communities that are both integrated with the wider locality and also lead to improved sense of community. This has been noted by a number of authors. For example Falk and Carley state “the local school or health centre can play a key role in building a sense of community and local pride, and therefore needs to be in place early on so it acts as a community hub in bringing strangers together” [37]. Stott *et al.* note that “timely and coordinated delivery of developments along with enforcement of S106 agreements is needed to ensure new communities do not ‘fail’ before they begin and become communities of ‘no choice’”, although interestingly they also commented that “a little ‘planned deprivation’ was not necessarily a bad thing and...sharing a common adversary was the best way to engender community spirit” [38].

At present, new communities often lack basic facilities, such as a shop, health centre, schools, place of worship or even a post box. S106 agreements do require developers to pay for the additional cost of infrastructure arising from the development, most frequently school places, affordable housing, road infrastructure or drainage. However, this lack of basic facilities can arise because S106 agreements mean that pre-determined “trigger points” (usually the number of built or occupied housing units) have to be reached before such facilities are deemed to be required. This is particularly true of schools and other public sector facilities. Where housing markets are more fragile, developers may build to just below that trigger point, leaving communities with a sense of being isolated in the middle of a building site. The costs of land clearance, provision of utilities and roads mean that community centres and other social facilities often come low down the list of S106 requirements. Social infrastructure can often suffer in negotiations between councils and developers. In addition, where social housing in such developments is released for occupation in blocks, the consequent arrival of residents who may require higher levels of support and services at the same time can highlight the shortcomings of the few public services that may exist during the early stages of development.

### 3.3.2. Schools—The Need for Consideration at an Early Stage

A number of respondents commented on the role of the local school as being at the heart of the community. The NPPF requires local authorities to ensure that a sufficient choice of school places is available to meet the needs of existing and new communities. Planning the provision of sufficient school places was a source of frustration for a number of councillors: “[they have] been talking about the third primary school since about 2006, because every year they’ve been using the statistics across the whole county to say how many children per fifty houses—a standard thing. [It is] very difficult to get things done that use different forecasts.” (KHM2). Often a formula is used, but experience of new communities is that the birth rate is frequently much higher than existing settlements and the formula proves inadequate. In 2009 it was noted that Cambourne had the highest birth rate in the country at 24.1 births per 1000 population (higher than countries such as Brazil and India). The County Council acknowledged that Cambourne “has more births than expected for an average settlement of its size” [39]. In Kings Hill, a third primary school has been the subject of debate since 2006 and was high on the wish list of residents visiting the public exhibition for the next phase of development. In Cambourne it was agreed that two primary schools would be required, but that secondary school students would attend the nearby Comberton Village College. The reality is that by 2013 a fourth permanent primary school was being built, along with a five form of entry secondary school (*i.e.*, 150 places per year). The location of these schools is not necessarily ideal in terms of the local catchment and the secondary school is on the edge of Cambourne near to the Business Park, because they are an “add-on” rather than an integral part of the original design.

### 3.3.3. Schools—the Role of Admission Policies

The admissions policies in schools were found to play a key role in the development of communities. For example, for many years the policy of Cambridgeshire County Council has been that in new developments such as Cambourne a primary school will open at the start even if there are only a handful of children (in Cambourne’s case, five children); the first school in Kings Hill was opened

in 2003, some four years after development commenced. The Admissions Policy in Kent has caused a number of problems for primary school children at Kings Hill and the local councillor has conducted a long campaign to try to improve the system: “A couple of years ago I thought I had got them to admit it was balmy and to accept a different system, but as soon as I took my eye off the ball they moved all the goalposts back again” (KHM2). There are currently two primary schools, but students are accepted from a wider catchment area than Kings Hill. Some parents from outside Kings Hill have chosen to send their children to the new schools in Kings Hill, in preference to older schools in their own community. Standard admission policy is determined on the distance to a school “as the crow flies”, meaning that for some houses in Kings Hill the nearest school is not actually in Kings Hill, but in neighbouring villages. However, the limited access to Kings Hill means that some parents have to drive past both Kings Hill schools, out of the development and to the next village. In situations such as this the local councillor can play a significant role in lobbying the council to ensure that the system works for rather than against new residents.

#### 3.3.4. Transport

Similarly, the design of transport infrastructure can have substantial social effects. For example, the design of Waverley, requiring parents to drive their children to school, highlights issues of connectivity seen in other new developments. This has also been noted at Cambourne and Kings Hill. Opposition from residents in Bourn to a public transport and footpath link between Bourn and Cambourne means that buses have to take a circuitous route to access both villages. At Kings Hill the local councillor described how the village is quite isolated, with one way in and out. Although deliberately designed with this in mind it isolates the new community from existing ones: “the key to understanding Kings Hill is how the place is constructed—one way in and one way out. You could walk, but you have to drive all the way round. There are some interesting side effects. It does isolate; the community has been deliberately built for the good of all parties in a sense to isolate the new community from the old” (KHM2). The result in three of the case studies (Longbridge being the exception), is a community in which a car is essential for access and walking and cycling did not form part of the transport hierarchy. This is another area where the local councillor can play a significant role in ensuring positive environmental outcomes for the new community, by increasing connectivity, within and between the development.

#### 3.3.5. The Need for Adequate Provision of Local Services

Local councillors can provide help to bring about provision of other important aspects of social infrastructure. Particularly in places such as Kings Hill and Waverley, where communities are physically isolated, local services can help reduce the need to travel. These might include a small local shop for essentials and basics such as a post box. It was observed that in Waverley “What you end up within the early years is a small housing estate, no shops or facilities. [The] private sector don’t see facilities as viable without a critical mass” (WO). Lack of local facilities was also observed during interviews with young people in Love’s Farm, St Neots, Cambridgeshire during a scrutiny review into new communities [40]. Developers are unlikely to build a local or town centre until it is economically viable to do so, leaving communities lacking in the basic facilities taken for granted in more

established communities. Greater flexibility in planning law may enable small local enterprises to be set up until more permanent facilities can be provided. Local authorities might also want to consider how they can support such enterprises, perhaps via financial incentives, such as creative application of business rate retention. In the context of government proposals for councils to be able to retain business rates, the Local Government Chronicle observed that councils could “use this freedom as a tool to nuance the shape of the local economy, using rate reductions to encourage growth of particular business types. Long term, this could be a powerful place-shaping opportunity” [41]. Without it, as Kaszynska notes “current funding streams are fragmented and disjointed, and do not provide long term strategic vision for coordinated community resourcing” [36].

### 3.3.6. Infrastructure Can Facilitate a Sense of Shared Local History

In both Longbridge and Kings Hill respondents spontaneously referred to the importance of recognising a shared history of the area in the development of a sense of shared identity within communities, and how this could be facilitated by infrastructure: “[they] haven’t got the shared history, shared memory or community memory” (LM). Richardson highlights how identity and heritage are unique to individual developments and “people’s emotional connections with the places where they lived and worked” can be seen “as ‘positive territorialism’” [42]. Many of the central roads in Kings Hill are named after its wartime history and the local pub is called “The Spitfire”. A number of respondents noted that a shared memory and history was not present in new developments making it more difficult to create a sense of community. In Longbridge there has been support for a museum, to enable residents to understand the heritage of the site: “one proposal is for some form of dedicated community facility, provided by the development which the community can occupy, manage and run” (LO). However this has not been a major priority for developers or the Council and local residents have not had the capacity or support to make it a reality. At Kings Hill, some of the existing World War Two buildings have been retained and the renovated Control Tower forms the centre of the retail area.

### 3.3.7. Summary

In summary, provision of appropriate social infrastructure, including community services, is recognized as a key indicator in achieving social sustainability as noted by Tanguay *et al.* [16] and is an area recognized as often neglected within new developments. Councillors may find a checklist of infrastructure requirements helpful in responding to major planning applications. Key findings from our interviews included that the modelling of the number of school places required in a new development needs to be considered in the light of experience of higher birth rates, leading to a shortage of places. Planning officers may wish to consider a more accurate method to ensure that sufficient places are available locally, reducing the need to travel. The careful design of new developments can help provide greater integration with the existing communities, and the hierarchy of transport can play an important role in the design and future integration of new communities. Respondents commented that where possible the history of the area should be promoted and celebrated, possibly through creative use of existing buildings to give greater community cohesion and a shared sense of identity. Providing “hubs” for new residents to meet can lead to greater community cohesion at an earlier stage. Greater flexibility through planning rules to allow residential property to

be used to provide social infrastructure on a temporary basis, prior to completion of a permanent alternative, may allow for provision of services at an earlier stage in the development. Local facilities often need support, either by the local community, the local council or the developers to enable them to be delivered.

### *3.4. Governance and Accountability can Help or Hinder Community Development*

#### *3.4.1. Ward Boundaries Can Impact on the Development of Communities*

Arrangements for governance in a new development can play an important role in community engagement. Depending on the size of the development a boundary review may be required, but in the early stages existing boundaries can lead to tensions, particularly in parished areas. This was noted particularly in Cambourne: "...what benefit has Bourn had from the development? Today, we try to see some real benefit to parishes. People in Bourn don't like Cambourne because it took their name" (CO).

In Waverley, no boundary review is planned for the first ten years and the development is physically isolated from its parent parishes. The actual boundaries are not clear, making ownership by some local councillors difficult, since the extent of their responsibility is not clear: "at application stage [we] met with the parish councils—Orgreave and Catcliffe—neither of which were sure where their boundaries went on the site because [it was] always an industrial site" (WO). The early residents may not therefore be aware who their elected councillors are. Effective ward councillors will therefore ensure that they know their ward well, are clear on its boundaries and that they are known to their constituents

The point at which a parish council is formed can affect the development of a new community. In the case of Cambourne, a parish council was formed on completion of the first 1000 houses, which planning officers might now say is too late: "it was always intended that there would be a parish council—built into the S106—whether the timing was right—we would do it much earlier these days. [the] 1000th house... was about third of the way through what was planned" (CO). Until the Parish Council was set up, the precept (the tax levied by a public body to fund expenditure, often known as the Council Tax) raised from homes in Cambourne went to the relevant parish council—either Bourn or Caxton. The precept was not necessarily spent in Cambourne and consequently when the parish council was formed in Cambourne it had no budget. Both Kings Hill and Cambourne experienced problems recruiting sufficient councillors to the council in the early days. The chairman of Kings Hill Parish Council felt this was in part due to the nature of the residents' lifestyles, with many of them being away from the village for work during the day "they go to work, come home and shut the door; they are very apathetic, there are twelve councillors and they are not easy to get" (KHM2). However, this is not always a problem that is confined to new communities, or even at parish council level. The local County Councillor observed that the lack of a shared history or "community memory" meant that whereas in established communities there is a "rural mindset" to get local problems sorted locally, in Kings Hill there is a greater expectation that someone else will solve the problem: "Typically we've got people in Kings Hill who are essentially city or town people, they do not have a rural mindset. They think that they have moved to the country, whereas the people who live in the other villages think "who are they kidding"; they're not in the country, they're in the city that's been transplanted into the

country. Here, I get e-mails from people complaining that the verge hasn't been mown, in the other village, someone will just get out and mow it. I'm not saying people here are more difficult, or vice versa, but the problems are different and the nature of the people who settle here and thus the community that is created is quite different" (KHM2).

#### 3.4.2. Management Companies in Tension with Local Government

Different governance arrangements apply in different areas. The setting up of a Management Company to carry out some local tasks is becoming increasingly widespread. Sometimes these are a temporary arrangement pending the formation of a parish council. In other areas such as Kings Hill and Waverley they are intended to be a permanent feature. The Management Company charges a fee on each property to cover its costs. This approach has also been adopted in other areas, such as New Hall in Harlow. It was noted in both Cambourne and Kings Hill that there were tensions between the Management Company and the parish council; in Cambourne "they used to have a management group which caused lots of problems when the parish council was formed because they didn't want to give up the power they perceived they had" (CC). In Cambourne the Management Company no longer exists. In Kings Hill the chairman of the parish council is also a Director of the Management Company and therefore provides a link between the two organisations. The appointment of a local councillor to the Management Company may offer more explicit accountability.

The advantage of a Management Company, particularly in the early days of a development, is that it can ensure that the area is kept clean and tidy. This can be important in giving residents a greater sense that they are living in a new community, rather than simply on a building site. Groves *et al.* credit the enduring success of the Bourneville Estate in Birmingham in part due to "sustained estate management capacity" and "the high quality natural environment" [43]. The quality of the development is particularly important for the developers in Kings Hill, in terms of attracting new residents. In Cambourne the informal open space is managed by the Wildlife Trust, who are based in Cambourne. In his review of the lessons learned from Cambourne, Platt refers to the success of this approach and the fact that there are open wooded spaces only a few hundred yards from the village centre [44]. A key issue can be whether and at what point these responsibilities are taken over by a parish council or other service provider.

#### 3.4.3. Summary

Governance is a category of social sustainability indicator identified by Tanguay *et al.* [16] which forms a key thread running through this paper, with its focus on the role of the local councillor. Certain specific elements of governance were highlighted by interviewees, which we summarise now. Clarity about ward boundaries, particularly in regeneration areas, so that local residents know who their ward councillor is can help to develop a sense of the local community and local identity. Management Companies may have a role in ensuring high quality maintenance in the early days of a development undertaking duties normally carried out by a parish or town council. However, it is important that their membership ensures that they are answerable to the local community rather than to developers. Where Management Companies are established, the appointment of a local councillor to the Board may lead to a sense of greater accountability. In parished areas (usually rural areas) the timing of the formation



of, and funding arrangements for, a parish council can impact on its effectiveness. The local population needs to be of an appropriate size to attract sufficient candidates, but conversely not so large that the new community feels that all decisions are taken by neighbouring parish councils. District Councils who are responsible for collecting the precept need to consider how this is managed in new communities so that the local precept can be used locally, not by the existing parish or parishes in which the new development happens to be sited. Having such a pot of money can ensure that a new parish council can be more effective from an early stage. Above all, local democratic arrangements need to be structured in a way that allows new communities to feel that they own their development, linking back to our findings regarding community engagement, and highlighting how each of these elements interlinks with the others.

#### 4. Conclusions

Through this series of interviews with planning officers and local ward councillors in new communities, this short study has shown that there can be considerable challenges for local councillors as new communities are developed, whether they are on greenfield sites or regeneration projects. Our findings suggest that local authorities may wish to consider the needs of new communities from a new perspective. Too often the public sector concentrates on the big strategic picture—where it wants to be in 10 or 20 years' time—but in doing so may fail to take sufficient account of the “human scale”—what matters to the individual or the family today. A practical additional outcome from this study has been a report highlighting to the local authority community improved ways of consulting and engaging with local communities, so that communities can feel that they are in control of development that is taking place in their neighbourhood [45].

None of the communities in the four case studies are “complete”, in the sense that house building on all four sites is continuing and in three cases (Cambourne, Kings Hill and Waverley) the original concept has been adapted to take account of changed and changing circumstances. Scheurer stressed the importance of “ongoing evaluation” of sites, such as Vauban “with regard to the long term viability of its innovations in sustainability, both technically, socially and in governance terms” [22]. Evaluating whether they are a success in terms of a wider definition of sustainability and whether they have achieved their aims may not be possible for some considerable time. Cambourne has been the subject of a number of studies which have attempted to evaluate its success, notably Platt's study “Lessons from Cambourne” and the South Cambridgeshire District Council report “Cambourne: a sustainable community?” [44], however the others do not appear to have any evaluation plans currently in place. While a Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) is an established tool for assessing the social care and health needs of a population in a local authority area (used by all the case study County Councils), of the four case studies, Cambourne's local authority (Cambridgeshire) is the only Local Authority to have conducted a JSNA specifically for their new community.

Referring back to our Introduction, we described a number of commonly measured aspects of social sustainability, including community engagement, community services and local governance arrangements. We also noted that particular sustainability outcomes were often held implicitly by those involved in the projects, rather than made explicit. Some, but not all of these aspects can be seen to have been pushed forward in each of the case studies. Both Kings Hill and Cambourne place a strong

emphasis on the quality of the environment. Kings Hill and Waverley, through the Management Companies, will ensure sustained estate management. Through the Consultative Group, the positive involvement of the community has been demonstrated in Longbridge.

The research aimed to consider the role of a local councillor representing their local community and communities which did not yet exist. Looking at how existing communities and early residents were engaged in a way that enables them to shape the development of their communities, the advent of the internet and the development of social media were seen to have an impact on community engagement and communication. It also identified that by engaging outside consultants communities might feel more engaged and less “done to” than might otherwise be the case.

The research sought to examine the nature of the relationship between councillors, their local authority and developers. It showed that in greenfield areas there is often considerable resentment to the new development from existing communities, but experience from all four studies has shown that outcomes for the local area are improved when developers and councillors can work in partnership. The shift from opposition at the initial planning phase, when a number of sites may have been identified for development, to working with developers as building commences can be a difficult change and may require support and capacity building for councillors from the officers in the local authority. Subsequently, there can be challenges for councillors who have to represent both new and existing communities. Existing communities may resent the new development, blaming it for an increase in traffic in the area, or the loss of a local facility in their own community. Developers also have a key role to play here, and this might be a useful subject for further research, but at present their only requirement is to mitigate the impact of their development. Any further change to that requirement would be subject to national legislation.

One additional issue that was identified from the interviews was the potentially significant role that “one person with a vision” can make. This is consistent with the findings of Evans *et al.* [21] who talked of “the importance of key individuals in driving a local sustainable development process forward”. This was commented on in Cambourne, where the appointment of a pro-active Parish Clerk enabled land transfers to be accelerated and relationships with the developers were improved. In both Cambourne and Kings Hill a long standing Chairman of the Parish Council has provided continuity and knowledge of the area to be a strong local representative for the community. Similarly, it was noted in a scrutiny report into the provision of social infrastructure in Cambridgeshire’s new communities how the retirement of key personnel can result in the significant loss of expertise, and that knowledge retention is of vital importance” [40]. This would also be a useful area for future research.

We also examined what social infrastructure is required to support new communities. The results demonstrated that provision of appropriate infrastructure (including schools, community facilities and local amenities) and, critically, the timing of its delivery, play a major role in community development. Infrastructure can be as simple as ensuring that the design provides connectivity, allowing residents the opportunity to meet in the course of normal every day activities, or to ensure that the new community is not physically isolated from the surrounding area. It is also about ensuring that trigger points for provision of community facilities are appropriate and delivered on time. The role of the local councillor in ensuring that appropriate infrastructure is provided is vital.

This research also sought to consider whether governance and the management of the public realm can have an impact on perceptions of the area and community wellbeing. Setting up a Management

Company to administer the open space can have advantages, but in parished areas may lead to tension with existing parish councils. Timing of boundary reviews and setting up a new parish council is a crucial stage in the development of a new community. Set up too early and there may be issues around capacity and the ability to attract sufficient applicants to stand, although this can also be a problem in well-established communities. Too late and the community may feel disempowered. A management charge, on top of the normal precept is becoming more widespread and can provide a welcome source of income in the early days to pay for maintenance of the public realm or other community facilities. Where the development falls into an existing parish, consideration may need to be given as to how the funds can be ringfenced to provide a source of income for the new community.

The role of local councillor has undergone considerable change in recent years as noted by Imrie [23]; for example, the Local Government Act 2000 legislated for a move away from a Committee structure to one where decisions are taken by a Cabinet, consisting of not more than ten councillors, for all but the smallest of Councils. For Councillors not part of the Cabinet there is the opportunity to shape and challenge decisions made by the Executive through Overview and Scrutiny Committees, although their exact form can vary from one authority to another. There is a great deal of existing written support and guidance on local authority matters available to local authority officers. Consequently the provision of officer training has likewise grown [10]. The experience of the first author as a local ward councillor, has been that in the past training for councillors has been less structured. The Local Government Association (LGA) runs training events and Leadership Academies, generally for executive councillors; advice and guidance is also available from the Local Government Information Unit; training for councillors in quasi-legal roles, such as members of planning or audit committees is available and often local training sessions are arranged on specific topics, often for new councillors. However, there is less support for councillors in their day-to-day role, in particular, and little existing guidance on how to deal with the challenges of new communities regarding achieving sustainability outcomes at this crucial phase. Indeed, Richardson noted in a study based in Bradford that while there was evidence of good practice, skills of councillors was variable: “There were gaps in both the capacity of members and the support systems for them that made it harder to achieve effective community leadership” [42]. One of the core aims of this paper has been to begin to address this need for adequate guidance, which is complemented by the report to local authorities noted above, along with various presentations to relevant audiences by the first author.

While this study represents one of the first pieces of research to examine the role of the local councillor within new communities, evidently in one study it is not possible to explore all of the factors relevant to this role in detail. For example, although one of the interviews at Kings Hill was undertaken during a public consultation, local residents were not interviewed as part of this study, who are an important additional source of information regarding the ways in which local councillors might facilitate local engagement and community development. Although a variety of councillors were interviewed from different tiers of local authorities, not all ward or county councillors were available for interview. In addition, a number of councillors who were interviewed have been elected since developments were first considered and did not therefore have as much background knowledge relating to community engagement and governance as some previous councillors. More generally, this research does not attempt to address the issue of how social infrastructure is financed, or what savings might accrue to local authorities and other public bodies as a result of any early investment. Such

issues highlight the ongoing need for research in this area to inform future practice, and ensure that research feeds into practice on the ground.

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## Conflicts of Interest

As noted in Section 2.3, the first author was serving as a County Councillor during the research, which all participants were aware of. The authors declare no other conflicts of interest.

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